

BILL GOTHARD'S ECUMENISM

October 11, 1997 (David Cloud, Fundamental Baptist Information Service, P.O. Box 610368, Port Huron, MI 48061, 866-295-4143, fbns@wayoflife.org; for instructions about subscribing and unsubscribing or changing addresses, see the information paragraph at the end of the article) -

The following is from John Ashbrook's *New Neutralism II: Exposing the Gray of Compromise* (1992, Here I Stand Books, 8686 Hilltop Drive, Mentor, OH 44060) --

Bill Gothard was a 1957 graduate of Wheaton College. For several years he worked with teenage gangs in the Chicago area. In 1965 he developed a six-day seminar which has become known as the Institute in Basic Youth Conflicts. Gothard presents this seminar in person, or on videotape, in cities all across America. The crowds are tremendous-ranging up to ten thousand people. One report I read said that "in the first decade and a half, there were 350,000 red notebook-carrying alumni." I am certain that is true.

From whence come these large crowds? One of my ministerial brethren here in Ohio began his ministry in the United Brethren Church and left that church, because of its apostasy, about the time of the United Methodist merger. In conversing about Gothard he told me of accepting an invitation to a Gothard Pastors' Seminar in Dayton. Much to his chagrin, he found himself surrounded by his former Methodist and United Brethren associates--all of whom enjoyed the seminar tremendously. There is something wrong here. The ecumenical crowd does not enjoy fundamentalist meetings. It must have been something else.

What I know about the sponsorship of a Gothard seminar I learned a few years ago, when there was a movement to bring a seminar to Cleveland. The groundwork was laid by General Association of Regular Baptist pastors. I received a letter from one of them who seemed to be serving as chairman of the effort. His letter said that "Over 75 pastors have written a letter of interest and invitation for a seminar to be brought to the greater Cleveland area. We have now generated enough local interest that we may move to the next step toward having a seminar here." Included with that letter was a sheet titled, "THREE PHASES IN SELECTING A SEMINAR LOCATION." Three steps were given and one was headed "Phase II - Petition for Seminar by Local Christian Leadership." The first sentence under this heading reads as follows: "This phase begins when the seminar headquarters receives personal letters of invitation from the majority of pastors representing the various denominations in a city's greater metropolitan area." That is the same policy Billy Graham uses. That explains the mixed crowd at a Gothard Seminar, which will run the gamut from Catholic priests and nuns, to the ecumenical crowd, to the new evangelical crowd. That is bad, but the tragedy is that the audience will be well sprinkled with professing fundamentalists. The fellowship of sitting for six days with that mixed multitude makes the fundamentalists layman go home saying, "The priest I sat beside was a very nice fellow." Attitudes toward false religion and plain unbelief are softened by participation.

In the margin of the sheet from which I have most recently quoted I find that I had jotted down at some time a quotation from Dr. Charles Woodbridge. It asks a question: "Does it spurn, or does it promote, the deadly ecumenical compromise of today?" The question makes the needed point.

The Projector for August 1981, carries a statement from the church bulletin by the pastor of the Metropolitan Baptist Church of Atlanta, Georgia. I do not know the name of that pastor. However, I agree with what he says:

Second, I cannot support Gothard because he does not identify himself as a fundamentalist and does not teach his hearers that remaining in liberal and neo-evangelical churches is a sin.

I have talked with men across America who have voiced the same concerns. Others have said he is going to change. Unless and until he publicly identifies himself as a fundamentalist, exposes the liberal churches, and changes his teaching on authority, I cannot support him.

For years I have heard of good fundamentalists who have gone to convince Bill Gothard to be a fundamentalist. They have come away saying, "Gothard really wants to be a fundamentalist ... just give him time." Much time has been given. Gothard may believe the fundamental doctrines, but he does not act like a fundamentalist. As long as he acts like a new-evangelical and serves that cause, I will have to treat him as one. He seems to believe in the Southern Baptist doctrine of parity, for I know of at least one instance in which he combined the SBC's Dr. Charles Stanley and a well-known fundamentalist on the same program. I count Bill Gothard as a new evangelical popularizer (John E. Ashbrook, *New Neutralism II*, pp. 73- 74).

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